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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAY QUITO 0345
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0524
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PINR PE
SUBJECT: VIEWS FROM THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL: ALL EYES ON THE
PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

REF: A. LIMA 1887

1B. LIMA 1852

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The excitement of the first round of voting in the Peruvian presidential election campaign has lessened now that the run-off has come down to Union por el Peru's (UPP) Ollanta Humala and APRA's Alan Garcia. While the two candidates continue to preside over rallies of their faithful supporters, the media and general public are less interested in the daily give-and-take on issues and campaign promises. Instead, the focus has been on whether Humala and Garcia will engage in a nationally televised debate, which, after a week of negotiations was decided in the affirmative: Sunday, 5/21, at 20:00. Humala's U.S. visa travails and APRA's accusations that the UPP was engaged in dirty tricks briefly captured the headlines, before taking a back seat to more newsworthy (in the Peruvian context) accounts of drunken escapades on President Toledo's plane ride to Spain and Fujimori's release on bail. The more professional Apoyo and DATUM polls have Garcia ahead by 12-14 percent, but a less reliable survey recently garnered attention by claiming the APRA candidate's lead is over 20 percent. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Political commentators and poll analysts attribute the relative lack of interest in the presidential campaign to the fact that the two finalists have the highest negative ratings of any of the original main candidates. Thus, they concluded, for the fifty percent of eligible voters who cast their ballots for other contenders or in blank, the 6/4 run-off ballot has come down to a choice between which candidate is seen as the lesser of two evils. With low public attention to the campaign, the media has not hesitated to shift its focus whenever a juicy scandal, such as the drunken escapades of an unnamed Foreign Ministry officer aboard the presidential jet bound for Spain, appear. On 5/19, news that ex-President Alberto Fujimori had been released on bail, consigned all campaign coverage to the back pages.

13. (SBU) With waning interest in the candidates and their specific policy proposals, the media and public's attention with respect to the electoral contest has centered on whether Humala and Garcia will hold a public debate. APRA co-Secretary General Jorge del Castillo and UPP Second Vice President candidate Carlos Torres met daily for a week to

hammer out the terms of the contest, all the while accusing the other's party of seeking excuses to avoid debating. In the end they agreed on an hour-long session, to be held Sunday, 5/21, at the National Archeological and Anthropological Museum in Lima, and televised by the State Channel, with private stations free to pick up the broadcast if they wish. Augusto Alvaro Rodrich, editor of the daily "Peru 21" was chosen as the moderator. The two candidates will address five topics, with each given three minutes to state his respective views, two minutes to reply to the other's statement, and then one minute to respond to the other's reply. The five topics are:

- Democracy, governability and human rights;
- Economic policy and the fight against poverty;
- Social policy and anti-corruption policy;
- Decentralization; and
- Citizen security.

¶4. (SBU) Garcia, in his public comments, is pushing the message that he stands for "responsible change," while dismissing Humala's qualifications to handle the presidency, stressing his opponent's ties to Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, criticizing the UPP's economic proposals as populist and irresponsible, particularly Humala's claim that a UPP government would reduce fuel costs by 30 percent, and accusing the Humala camp of being engaged in dirty tricks. The latter accusations were bolstered when, following a raid by Public Ministry and National Electoral Board (JNE) officials on a print shop in Lima that resulted in the seizure of 60,000 anti-Garcia leaflets, Humala's father Isaac appeared claiming to be the printer's attorney.

¶5. (SBU) Humala's initial attempt to counter his own identification with Chavez by trying to drag the USG into the campaign over his visa revocation (Ref B), petered out after the press accurately reported that the revocation occurred months before Humala became a candidate and that the Humalistas were the ones who raised the issue publicly. The Ambassador also took the wind out of Humala's sails when he publicly offered to help facilitate the candidate's application for a new visa on 5/12. Humala himself made it clear that this was a dead issue on 5/17, following his meeting with visiting WHA P/DAS Charles Shapiro and the Ambassador.

¶6. (SBU) The UPP campaign is unfocused, at times attacking Garcia for the failures of his first presidency (1985-90), then shifting to launching promises to provide universal health care and to lower fuel prices by reducing the government's taxation on petroleum and gas products. During the negotiations over a presidential debate, the Humalistas were put on the defensive over APRA's charges that the formers' anti-Garcia television ads were "dirty tricks," and have agreed to discontinue them as part of the debate accord.

¶7. (SBU) The two most professional polls, carried out by the Apoyo and DATUM consultancies, show Garcia ahead by 12-14 points (Ref A). A recent poll by the University of Lima, however, garnered headlines by claiming that Garcia's lead is over 23 percent (61.9 - 38.1). COMMENT: Apoyo and DATUM carry out polls using more extensive sampling and better methodology than other polling firms, and they do so with regularity (Apoyo is releasing polls weekly). Consequently, even though Apoyo's and DATUM's numbers may not accurately predict the final precise voting totals, they have been reliable indicators of voting trends. As a result, we recommend that Peru observers focus on the Apoyo and DATUM figures for assessing electoral possibilities, while recognizing that surveys released by other polling firms can have an impact on how the candidates act, as well as on how the media and electorate assess the ongoing campaign. END COMMENT.

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